

## Look Not With The Eyes by eyesandarrows

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Everyone Lives/Nobody Dies, Billy Hargrove Deserves Better, Experiment!OC, Fix-It, Fluff and Angst, I Don't Even Know, I'm Bad At Summaries, Lets just have fun with it, Mild Language, Multi, OC is 006, Original Character(s), Polyamory, Polyamory Negotiations, Post-Season 2, Rating May Change, Slow Burn, Warnings May Change, playing fast and loose with canon, so i'm giving him an age appropriate girlfriend AND boyfriend, steve/OFC/billy endgame, vague as HECK physical description of OC

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Nancy Wheeler, OC - Character, Steve Harrington

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington/Original Female Character(s), Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Minor or Background Relationship(s), Steve Harrington/Original Female Character(s)

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**Summary:**

A story in which I use an OC proxy to alter the outcome of season 3 and save Billy. Comes prepackaged with plot.

# 1. The Truant

January, 1985

Indiana in the winter was a really shitty place to move to. At least, that's what Summer decided after the third time her car skid on a nasty piece of ice when she turned a corner.

If she didn't find what she was looking for in the next hour she was going to lose her fucking mind. Seriously, a town like this there had to be somewhere she could hole up. An abandoned farm house, an empty cabin, *something*.

She supposed she could always stay at a motel until she found the right spot because there was no way in hell she was going to sleep in her car in the frigid temperature. The motel was a last resort, however. The fewer people she interacted with, the better.

Seconds away from saying to hell with it and making a u-turn back into town, she finally came across her quarry alongside a frozen over dirt road.

She slowed to a stop in front of the abandoned trailer and peered out her foggy window.

The front door was blocked by a tall snow bank and there was no parked car in the driveway. Hell, there weren't even tire tracks in the snow anywhere to be found. And it was the only property in sight along the lakeside.

She beamed at the wonderful sight.

"Home, sweet, home."

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Of course, her luck couldn't last forever.

A few days of home maintenance and tidying up, she was due for a supply run. So, she bundled up in a heavy coat and ventured into town with the intention of buying a few essentials. The parking lot

was mostly empty and she let her guard slip a little. The inside of the grocery store was cramped and decently stocked enough to distract her.

“Playing hooky, are we?”

Her head snapped to the side, startled.

A uniformed deputy stared down at her.

“Uh..” she stared back at him dumbly, dread creeping down her spine.

He raised a brow and crossed his arms over his lanky chest. “You’re supposed to be in class right now, aren’t you?”

She swallowed thickly, her heartbeat roaring in her ears. “Actually no, but I get that a lot. I graduated a couple years ago. You sure make a girl feel young again,” she chuckled hollowly as she moved back away slowly.

His frown deepened and he put his hands on his narrow hips. “Now hold on a minute. What do you take me for?”

By now it seemed like every patron in the store had gravitated towards their confrontation as she felt a dozen eyes on her and the cop. Great. This was the last thing she needed.

She sighed and hung her head guiltily. “Alright. Fine. You’ve got me, officer. I guess I’ll just get back in my car and head straight back to school...”

She turned to the door and when the cop didn’t argue, she thought she was in the clear. Until she noticed him follow her out to the parking lot. She stuffing her fists into her pockets to fish for her keys, she raised a questioning eyebrow.

“I’ll just escort you back to Hawkins High to make sure you get there without any detours,” he told her smugly as he made his way to his cruiser.

She wanted to stomp her feet and scream in frustration but another

person laden with grocery bags had followed them out of the store.

“Thanks very much,” she replied sarcastically as she slid into her car, slamming the door.

She didn’t even know where the fuck Hawkins High was! And that fact became painfully clear when the cop pulled her over after a few too many wrong turns and told her to just follow him. As she did, she debated whether or not it would be a good idea to peel off and zoom away.

“That would probably be a bad idea,” she grumbled under her breath as she glared at the cop’s cruiser in front of her. Not to mention, she’d be opening herself up to a whole new host of problems.

At last, they arrived in the packed Hawkins High parking lot. She parked and climbed out of her car uncertainly. The cop remained in his cruiser and instead gave a pointed gesture towards the school’s entrance.

Fuck. He really wasn’t going to leave until he saw her enter the school.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” she muttered as she reluctantly made her way into the school. As soon as she crossed the threshold she paused by the doors and peered through the thin slot of glass window, watching the cop cruiser pull out of a space and drive away.

“Yes!” she cheered quickly, her hand already curling around the door handle.

“Can I help you, young lady?”

“Jesus!” she gasped, spinning around, her hand on her chest.

An older woman stared at her in amusement from the doorway to what looked like an office.

“Everything alright?” she asked curiously.

She nodded a little too quickly, her hand smoothing down the front of her coat, proverbial feathers ruffled once again.

“Yup. I was just...” she trailed off, her mind doing double time trying to come up with a valid excuse.

“Looking for the office perhaps?” the woman offered kindly. “You’re new aren’t you? I don’t think I’ve seen you around here before.”

“I...uh...” she bit the inside of her cheek, cursing inwardly. Getting caught by that cop before had seriously thrown her off her game! Where was her silver tongue when she needed it?

A blessed distraction in the form of a student turned the corner with a folder and spotted them. “Ms. Grigg? Is this a bad time?” she asked the older woman.

The woman smiled at her. “Nancy, I was just expecting you with the morning attendance. I can take it from here. Thank you, dear.”

‘Nancy’ handed her the folder and caught Summer watching her.

“Hello. Are you a new student?”

Shit. Once again caught in the spotlight, Summer wrestled with her better judgment and with a sinking feeling realized what she ultimately had to do.

She forced a brilliant smile to grace her lips and nodded.

“Yup. I was just looking for the office to register.”

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

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## 2. The Knock At The Door

A couple of minutes muscling through the necessary paperwork to register as a student (most of it was bullshit but a bit of heavy eye contact and a small nosebleed later had Ms. Grigg convinced) and Summer was ready for a tour of the school.

She carried her coat in her arms, clutching it to her chest like a safety blanket as the nondescript brick walls started to blend together from one hallway to another, occasionally broken up by metal lockers. (When Ms. Grigg showed her her own locker and how to open it with a combination, she actually found the experience quite novel.) She spent the rest of the tour trying to convince herself she was doing the right thing. After all, there were a lot of merits for hiding in plain sight instead of just hiding. She tried to think of a few examples but Ms. Grigg had stopped in front of a classroom door and was ushering her inside.

The entire room seemed to stop whatever it was they were doing to stare at her and Ms. Grigg's entrance. It was then that Summer suddenly conjured a long list of reasons why this had been a truly terrible idea. And now there was an entire group of people with eyes on her so she couldn't work her magic to get out of it.

She cast a furtive glance around the room as Ms. Grigg spoke to the teacher. Her observation was met with a number of curious leers and hushed whispering between some very unsubtle teenagers. Finally, Ms. Grigg was squeezing her arm in a friendly gesture and left her to the mercy of the classroom of strangers.

The teacher smiled at her tiredly and introduced herself. Summer immediately forgot her name.

"Class, this is Summer and she'll be joining us for the rest of the school year." The teacher spoke to the other teens and then to her, "Why don't you take a seat over by Nancy."

Right. Nancy. The student who gave her the awful idea of becoming a high school student in the first place.

She wished she hadn't left her coat in her locker so as to have something to go with her hands as she maneuvered through the grid system of desks until she reached the one beside Nancy. The dainty girl grinned sheepishly at her as she sunk into the uncomfortable chair. Summer mirrored the expression and turned to face the students seated around her. Her face felt hot as their stares did not dissipate.

She forcefully reminded herself that there was no way they could know who she really was or where she had come from. She was just another student who didn't want to be there and was just trying to get through the day. Yeah.

"I like your scrunchie," Nancy whispered to her as the teacher resumed her lesson.

Her heart jumped into her throat and she reflexively slapped a hand over her wrist.

She searched the other girl's expression carefully for clues as to whether or not she saw what was hidden underneath the scrunchie. Nancy shifted uncomfortably under the scrutiny and Summer realized her own odd behavior.

She managed a thin smile, "Uh, thank you."

Fully aware of what a bad impression she just made, Summer sunk lower in her seat and glanced at the clock above the teachers head. The hands seemed to tick forward so slowly.

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Perhaps she hadn't made an absolute freak out of herself in front of Nancy like she thought she had because the tiny brunette asked her if she wanted to sit with her and her friends at lunch after class. Summer gladly accepted.

With the money she had intended to go towards supplies and groceries, she bought herself an underwhelming school lunch and then spotted Nancy wave her over to a table.

Crossing the lunch room wasn't any less daunting than crossing the

classroom from earlier and the short walk she struggled to remind herself that no one knew what she *do* let alone what she had *done*. She stumbled as she neared Nancy's table. The boy sitting next to Nancy moved to get up and help her but she quickly sat down as gracefully as she could and he seemed to deflate.

"Summer, this is Jonathan. Jonathan, Summer," Nancy happily introduced everybody.

Summer and Jonathan exchanged stilted hello's and the conversation swiftly lapsed into silence.

Nancy shot an expectant look at Jonathan who in turn seemed to blanch and Summer took a moment to note how close the two were sitting next to each other.

"So, Summer," Nancy broke the silence like a wooden mallet. "Where was your last school?"

Summer hesitated before answering. "I was homeschooled."

Jonathan nodded thoughtfully. "What made you decide to go to Hawkins High?"

Summer dragged her hand underneath the table out of sight. "Um, well..."

Nancy took pity on her. "Just wanted to experience what high school is all about before graduation?"

Summer squinted at the other girl and nodded stiffly. "Yes. That. That is exactly, uh, it."

"That's cool." Nancy picked at her lunch. "School year's already halfway over. Have you applied to any colleges?"

"College?" Summer asked, slowly growing flustered by all the questions.

"Yeah..." Someone caught Nancy's eye and distracted her. "Oh, there's Steve. I'll introduce you."



Summer used the resulting lull in conversation to finally try some of the meager food she'd bought. Her expression must have given away her disappointment because the new comer, Steve, commented on it as he sat down next to her, "That bad, huh?"

Blushing, Summer swiped at her lower lip and pushed away the tray of food. "You could say that again," she agreed.

Steve grinned at her and clasped his hands on the table top. "I'm Steve Harrington," he said like she was supposed to know who he was. "And you are..?"

She sized him up with a baleful eye that seemed to throw him.

"New," she replied simply.

He opened his mouth as though he was going to say something but whatever thought he wanted to share seemed to abandon him. His jaw hung open and he blinked dumbly at her before he shook off the awkward tension. "Right. Yeah. That's cool," he nodded wildly, his hair flopping in the air.

Jonathan snickered into his milk. Nancy drummed her fingers on the table, quickly gaining everyone's attention. "Summer, meet Steve. Steve this is Summer. We were just talking about college plans."

Summer watched Steve shift awkwardly in his seat. "College. Yeah, I'm just waiting for the acceptance letters to start rolling in."

There was something about the way he said that, that made Summer doubt him. Not that it mattered to her. She actually sympathized with him. High school was one thing. College was entirely another. And she was only going to public school on a lark! The poor guy had no other choice.

A round of laughter erupted on the other side of the lunch room, startling her. Steve and the others glanced at her in mild concern.

"You okay?" he asked her, frowning.

She caught his eye and a strange feeling overcame her.

"Yeah, um. It's just a lot."

He nodded in understanding. "It's your first day right?" He asked absently, his gaze wandering across the room towards the loud group of teens.

She followed his eyeline. "First day ever."

"She was homeschooled before," Nancy supplied.

Steve hummed in acknowledgement, still watching the group across the room.

Summer wondered what he was seeing that she wasn't. A bunch of guys wearing matching jackets with the school mascot emblazoned on them, a couple of girls scattered among them, and at the center of the group was who she assumed to be the ringleader. He was handsome for sure with his long blond curls and striking blue eyes. The others seemed to be falling over themselves to be closer to him, to hear what he had to say.

The entire image reminded her of her studies back when she had a tutor and she was studying royalty through the ages. She was looking at a king and his court.

No, she couldn't be sure what Steve was seeing when he looked at the lot of them, but the expression on his face was anything but happy.

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All and all, her first day went better than expected.

She was actually kind of excited to go back the next day. Nancy was nice enough. Jonathan too. Plus she had a lot of classes with Steve. And, well, she liked Steve. He was nice to her and he was willing to share whatever she needed be it a pencil or paper. He freely gave tips about a class or a teacher which she appreciated.

When school finally let out for the day, Summer left with plans to have lunch with them all again the next day. And it was thrilling!

On her way home she picked up the supplies she had set out to get earlier in the day before her life took an unexpected turn when that

cop busted her. She could sense a routine forming in her future as she settled in for the night in her own place with goals of friendship and graduation. If she tried hard enough, she could almost pretend she was another normal kid, had been her entire life.

And then there was a knock on the front door.

### 3. 006

Summer could spot the police decal on the car parked next to hers through the slotted blinds when she cautiously peeked through.

Her first thought inexplicably was of the deputy from the store and she wondered frantically if he had found out where she was squatting. Logic slowly filtered through her panicked thoughts. The car was different and it had the word 'sheriff' on the side.

"Fuck!" she hissed.

What if it was *them*. The ones she had escaped from all those years ago. She was practically in their backyard after all. Maybe they hadn't been driven out of Hawkins after that scandalous story broke about the lab. Maybe they were finally coming to take her away again.

Her throat closed up and temporarily stopped breathing as terror seized her lungs in a cruel fist.

Whoever was on the other side of the door knocked again and she inhaled sharply.

On numb legs, she inched towards the door, her mind racing a mile a minute.

Whether it was *them* or someone else, she would handle it. She wasn't the helpless little girl from before. She knew how to take care of herself now she minded herself as steeled herself to open the door.

A fricken giant stood alone on the porch she had cleared a couple days ago. She quickly sized him up, throat working around a lump of anxiety. She noted the police uniform and badge. And gun.

Underneath a bushy mustache, he sported a friendly, if strained, grin.

"Good evening. Are your folks around so I can speak to them?"

Summer blinked up at him in bewilderment. "My...dad is in the shower." she lied.

The big guy nodded in understanding and glanced quickly over her shoulder inside the trailer before darting back to her.

“Do you mind if I come inside?” he asked casually and brought his hands up to his face to warm up with his breath. “It’s freezing out here.”

Her eyes narrowed briefly before her expression relaxed into nonchalance.

He wanted to come inside, *fine*. Even better.

She opened the door wide enough for him to enter and she cast a cursory look around the quiet road outside as she shut the door against the cold.

The sheriff stood in the middle of the living room taking a cursory look around much like she just had.

“Is it just you and your dad?” he asked, pivoting slowly as he attempted to look into the next room.

That wouldn’t do.

Summer stepped directly into his eye and dug deep inside herself, just as she had learned to when she wanted to get what she wanted.

“What is your name? What are you really doing here?” she asked calmly and clearly.

Caught in her unwavering gaze, the sheriff went stiff. He worked his jaw as though resisting the words eager to dive off his tongue. “I...” he started to say before trailing off.

Summer breathed deeply and pressed herself harder. She could taste the tell-tale taste of copper in the back of her throat as blood started tickling her nostril.

“Jim Hopper.” he admitted gruffly, with a hint of surprise. “I know you don’t live here. I know you’re lying.”

Blood began to trickle down her nose. “How?”

The big guy trembled. "This is my place. I used to live here."

Her eyes widened in surprise. Seriously? Was she really that unlucky?

"Used to?"

He was trembling with the effort to keep his mouth shut. "I-I've...got another place I stay at," he panted.

She glared at him, taking a step closer. "Who do you work for?"

He leaned back like he was trying to get away but was still rooted to the floor. "What? I'm the sheriff. I work for Hawkins Police."

She huffed in frustration. Blood plugged her right nostril and it was all she could taste. "Do you work for Hawkins Lab?" she snapped.

His brows drew together. "No." he answered freely, effortlessly. Genuinely.

She hesitated. He could be working for them and not even know it. She had to make sure he wasn't going to mess everything up.

She stared deep into his twitching eyes, taking in the straining tendons of his neck and steady flush on his face. "Did anyone tell you about me?"

"No." He grunted.

She frowned. But if no one told him to look for her, then that meant she just showed her hand to the real, honest to god *sheriff* of the town she was trying to hide in.

A new surge of panic arced through her entire body, startling her enough to break her focus and release her hold.

In an instant he had his weapon trained on her. She froze.

"Don't talk. Just show me your wrist. *Slowly.*" he ordered.

Her heart stuttered in her chest as she weighed her next action quickly. She hadn't flexed her unique muscles like that on such a strong minded person in a while. If she tried to command him again,

he might be able to resist long enough to pull the trigger. Fuck, if he even saw her open her mouth he might blow her away.

She knew why he wanted to see her wrist and that meant he knew what she was. Where she came from.

Slowly like he said, she stretched her other arm out enough for her sleeve to ride up her arm and bare her scrunchie-less wrist.

He made a noise of annoyance. Jerking his head in the direction of her other side, he told her "Other wrist."

She scowled and resisted the urge to bear her teeth. A beat passed and the tension grew. She remained still, not making any move to do as he ordered.

He seemed to be rethinking his course of action and she could see the precise moment he decided to switch tracks. Making a show of lowering the gun and holstering it, he held his hands up in a placating gesture. She watched him carefully the entire time, wondering where he was going with this display.

"I don't work for Hawkins Lab, but I know about what used to go on there. I know about Brenner. I know about-" he hesitated, as though searching for any different word than the one he wanted to use, "-about the experiments."

Tears pricked at the corner of her eyes and he noticed, his serious expression softening a fraction.

He lowered his tone into something gentle and earnest. "I want to help you. But you have to trust me first."

Summer looked away from him and instead fixed her gaze to the floor. She swiped at the pool of drying blood on her upper lip with the scrunchie on her wrist. She stopped and stared at the now stained fabric. Part of her wanted desperately to trust him. It wasn't the first time someone claimed to want to help her. First it was the doctors. And then it was her new guardians. She ran away from both because in the end they always wanted something else from her.

But this town was supposed to be the end of the line for her. She

wanted to make a home for herself in Hawkins. And getting on the good side of the town sheriff would only benefit her.

Before she could talk herself out of it, she slid the hair tie off her wrist and offered her hand for Hopper to shake.

He watched her carefully, calculating her actions. They clasped hands, his meaty fist drafting hers, and shook once before he turned her hand over.

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He took one look at the number before releasing her hand. She searched his face, looking for answers as to what was going through his head. Something about his shifting expression made her think that this was only the beginning of a long night.

He made a quick glance at his watch and seemed to be deciding something. Whatever it was resolved quickly as he pinned her with a look. "I'd like to ask you some questions."

Yup. The beginning of a very long night was ahead of them.



## 4. The Next Day

Summer hadn't been inclined to answer all of Hopper's questions.

She'd told him to call her Summer. He told her she could call him Hopper.

She told him about her abilities and explained what she could do with them. He had needed to sit down for that part of the conversation. In short summary, if she focused enough on a single person, she could tell them what to do and they would do it without question. She told Hopper that was how she had been able to escape when she was very young.

He asked her if there had been others with abilities and tattoos.

She told him, honestly, she didn't know. She had only escaped with one person. A guard that she eventually ditched when she was far enough away from Indiana.

He asked her why she came back and she awkwardly explained her reasoning that there were too many eyes on Hawkins for anyone to make a move against her.

The conversation became stilted after that. When Hopper asked a question like 'Where have you been living since you left Indiana?' she would reply with something vague and was by no way a real answer.

Being the seasoned interrogator he was, Hopper decided to table their conversation for another day. She was all too happy to oblige and she showed him the door. Before she could shut the door, he caught the barrier with his hand and made sure she was paying attention.

"We aren't done talking. I will be checking in again as soon as I can."

She rolled her eyes and raised a sardonic brow. "Don't worry, I won't leave town."

She didn't get much sleep that night despite the exhaustion of using her powers twice in the same day. Her head was full of worry. Maybe she was wrong. Maybe Hawkins wasn't as safe as she thought. Maybe

she couldn't trust Hopper after all. **Maybe her enemies were coming for her and were moments from breaking into the trailer and stealing her from her bed while she slept unsuspectingly.**

When the pale rays of dawn crept through the shuttered windows of the trailer, Summer had half a mind to stay in bed and just ditch school. But that was just her sleep deprivation talking. It was her anxiety that she was a sitting duck if she stayed in the trailer and it was that fear that drove her all the way to school.

She parked, turned off her car, and sat for a moment. Students around her were quick to abandon their cooling cars for the warmth of the school building as they weaved through the parking lot in sparse groups. Summer spotted Nancy and Jonathan as they entered the building. Noting their intertwined fingers, she realized they were *together* together, and filed that information away.

Finally, she managed to find the energy to get out of her car and start making her way towards the building with an armful of books. The roar of an engine did little to drown out the blaring rock n roll playing from the camaro that peeled into the parking lot, demanding her attention. She took one guess who the driver was as they maneuvered into an empty space at breakneck speed.

Her guess was confirmed when the loudmouth ringleader from lunch exited the beautiful blue car. She paid him little mind and continued her trek to the school. Once she made it to her locker and she dumped most of her books, she took a quiet moment to really ask herself if she had made the right decision leaving the trailer and going to class.

The thought was interrupted by Steve when he strolled up to her locker, took one look at the dark circles around her eyes and said, "Wow. Rough night?"

She grimaced and slammed her locker shut. "I don't want to talk about it."

He raised a rolled up paper bag and shook it. "Bagel slice?"

Her stomach growled at the thought of food. In her haste to escape

the walls closing in at the trailer, she had foregone making breakfast.

She eyed Steve warily, but soon gave in. "Yes please."

He grinned triumphantly and offered her the bag which she gratefully accepted. Exhaling a pleased sigh through her nose, the soft bread broke on her teeth and filled her mouth with delicious flavor. Crumbs fell from her lips as she munched away on her bagel slice, though she was too tired to care. Steve smirked at the sight, amused.

Summer decided she could get used to this school thing if it meant Steve would be there to meet her at her locker and offer her a bagel every morning. She liked having someone. It meant she was putting down roots, which was something she had little experience with. But in that moment, at the crack of dawn and everyone was still moving slowly, it felt like her and Steve were in their own little bubble. A flurry of movement by the doors pulled her away from this feeling.

Heads turned when the ringleader strode down the school hallway and students were immediately drawn to him like moths to a flame. Summer wondered how such a sleepy eyed individual could galvanise so many people. She could tell from her locker the guy was half asleep as the group around him stumbled over themselves trying to talk to him.

She stiffened the moment she caught his hooded gaze. Gone was the drowsy film to his eyes as they sharpened into something hungry. The closer he drew, the more alive he seemed to become. As he passed her locker, he threw her a flirty wink before his gaze flickered over to Steve who he bared his teeth at in a wicked grin. In the next step he paid them no mind, his attention drawn elsewhere.

Summer's face felt hot and she knew she was blushing. She glanced at Steve and realized he was too despite his glowering. Swallowing against the sudden dryness in her throat, she gained the impression that maybe Steve did not like the blond ringleader and the ringleader knew it. Either way, the two clearly had a history of some kind.

She couldn't help but say something. "So...that guy is...a lot."

Steve was still glaring after the other boy. "Yeah. That's Billy

Hargrove,” he said in a bitter tone like that was any kind of explanation.

Summer nodded, humming in understanding even though she definitely didn’t understand.

Steve finally tore his gaze away and faced her. “He was the new kid before you got here. I mean, the guy does one keg stand at a party and suddenly he’s the new king of the school. It’s whatever.” He looked away frowning, his thoughts a mystery to her.

Summer wasn’t sure what to say to that. She was actually tempted to pat him on the shoulder for lack of a better idea. Thankfully she didn’t because then Steve was looking to her again with a softened expression. Actually, if she didn’t know any better she’d say he looked a little nervous, but hopeful all the same.

“Speaking of parties...there’s one this weekend. Would you maybe want to go with me?” he asked her sheepishly and she felt her heart grow to sizes.

“Sure,” she found herself blurting out before rational thought caught up with her. A million concerns crowded her brain about why she shouldn’t have said that but then Steve was smiling at her and she was able to ignore the clamouring in her head.

“Great,” he breathed a relieved sigh.

*Yeah. Great.* she thought worriedly.

## 5. The Kiss

When school finally let out for the day, Steve was actually feeling pretty good about himself. It had been a couple months already since his social status took a dive and in that time Billy Hargrove had cemented his place as Hawkin High's new king. Steve tried to tell himself that he didn't care. Billy could have the stupid title. It didn't mean what it used to him anymore. At least, that's what he tried to tell himself.

Whatever.

Lunch was usually something he had to grit his teeth and just get through. It's not that he held anything against Nancy or Jonathan, but he still found it...difficult... to be at their table. No one wanted to be the third wheel, which it was painfully obvious to everyone in the lunchroom he was.

But not anymore! Now there was Summe who could provide a much needed buffer between his ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend. Not to mention, it helped to have someone new who hadn't been around when his life basically imploded and he became a joke.

He had to admit, he was just as obsessed with the idea of a new kid as the rest of his class. Well, a new kid that wasn't Billy Hargrove, anyway. Summer's arrival gave him the sense that he could maybe have a fresh start. Which was why he had invited her to the party that weekend. He hadn't been planning to go at first. What would be the point? His old teammates had been his only other friends and now they didn't want anything to do with him since he left the team. Plus now they had their new king, Billy.

When he saw Summer that morning at her locker looking just as tired as he felt he knew he could bear to go to that party if she was right there with him. For a split second before he asked he was struck with a stab of self doubt.

Thoughts like *what if she figured out what a loser I am and she says no?* bounced around in his brain in the few seconds it took for him to get the nerve to say the words out loud to ask her. The moment shook

him after all was said and done.

Though, she had readily agreed to go with him, he couldn't shake the feeling that the other shoe was going to drop when he least expected it. Still, he was determined to make the most of the night. If he was able to resurrect even a shred of his life before The Upside Down for even a moment when he was just another teenager at a party his parents would disapprove of, it would all be worth it.

Now he just had to convey that idea to Dustin when he told the preteen he had to cancel their weekly game night.

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*"Steve!* the curly haired teen gasped, scandalized.

Steve groaned. He knew it was coming and yet he was still set upon with a wave of guilt.

In the end he had decided it would be better if he didn't explain to Dustin why this party was so important to him. The kid wouldn't understand.

"Man, come on." Steve adjusted his grip on the steering wheel as he took a turn.

It wasn't a super long drive to the Henderson household from the school, but that day it sure felt like it.

"But Steve! You've never bailed on game night before." Steve could hear the pout in Dustin's voice.

Steve guffawed. "I've only been invited the last couple of times. Besides, th-the Party or whatever won't miss me. Plus, Mike doesn't seem to want me there at all."

Dustin mulled that over for a moment as he gazed out the windshield. "Yeah. Guess that is kinda true. But you did date his sister."

Steve scowled. "Dude."

Dustin shrugged. "I don't get it, Steve. You haven't wanted anything to do with parties or being popular since we closed the Gate. Why is this party more important than hanging out with people who actually give a shit about you?"

Steve chuckled. "Wow. Okay. First of all, I never said this had anything to do with being popular. It's just a party that happens to be the same night as game night. And I'm gonna go."

He glanced at his friend out of the corner of his eye. "I'm sorry, man."

Dustin frowned. "But, Steve."

Steve sighed. Dustin's street was in sight, which didn't leave a lot of time to assuage his guilt.

"I need this, Henderson," he finally admitted.

He pulled into the driveway and parked. Dustin stared at him searchingly. Steve could practically hear the cogs turning in his big brain. He tried not to squirm under the kid's stare.

At last, Dustin nodded once. "Okay."

Steve returned his nod and smiled faintly.

Dustin grabbed his school bag and opened his door. Steve raised a brow when the kid paused before he got out of the car. His friend leveled him with a serious expression.

"Don't blame me when you end up having a really shitty time at that lame ass party, Harrington."

Steve's eyes widened. "Okay. Cool."

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With Dustin's warning weighing on his mind, Steve tried not to let his words get to him as he readied to go pick up Summer. Eventually "fashionably late" came and went as he fussed with his hair for the hundredth time. So maybe he was a little nervous. Could anyone

blame him? The last party he went to his girlfriend called him bullshit and essentially broke his heart when she left with another guy. Granted, that other guy was Jonathan but that made it worse in a way.

"That was then. This is now," he declared to his reflection.

Not entirely sure he believed the sentiment, he worked his jaw and tore his judging gaze away from the mirror.

He surged down the stairs of his parents big empty house and hollered, "I'm leaving! Going to a party!"

He paused by the door and grabbed his coat. "Right. You're not here and you don't care."

He slammed the front door behind him.

\*\*\*

"So where are you from originally?" Steve asked as casually as he could while he peered through the windshield.

He had been beyond relieved Summer's parents hadn't been home when he arrived at her trailer. The place was a little out of the way from where the party was being held at, but it couldn't be helped. It was only polite for him to drive instead of her and he wanted to make a good impression. Plus she wasn't as familiar with Hawkins as he was.

"New York," Summer answered after a hesitant beat.

His brow raised at her reply. "Like the city?"

"Oh, um, no," she backtracked, slightly flustered. "I'm from...upstate."

Steve nodded, unsure what to do with this information. He cleared his throat awkwardly.

"My family visited the city once when I was little. Saw some shows on Broadway, walked through central park which was fun. My mom made us go to the museum of natural history and the Met which was



less fun. New York city is pretty much the opposite of Hawkins."

Steve could feel her loaded gaze on him as he navigated the darkened streets. "That might be a good thing, though, right?"

He snorted. "If you say so."

They arrived at their destination quick enough and as Steve hurried to open Summer's door for her, he began to feel a mounting sense of regret.

What was he even doing here?

And now he was dragging this innocent girl into his high school drama all because he needed a night off from dungeons and dragons?

God, he felt pathetic as he offered her his arm and began to lead them inside.

He had mixed feelings as they went largely unnoticed by the party-goers milling about the house. On the bright side, it wasn't as bad as he had been expecting. Regardless, he steered himself and Summer towards the booze.

"Drink?" he asked in a clipped tone.

Summer blinked at him, a little thrown by his urgency to pour himself a cup. "Uh, sure."

He forced a strained smile on his face to combat the natural downturn his mouth wanted to make. Over the rim of his cup, he couldn't help the swift survey around the room as he took a swig. He caught Summer staring at him.

"So, uh, are you having fun?" he asked and immediately followed with a wince.

*Nice, Harrington. That wasn't a totally lame question or anything.*

He needed to get a grip. Instead, he took another long sip.

"This is my first highschool party," she revealed quietly and he

almost didn't catch what she said over the loud music.

His mouth dropped into a surprised 'o' shape. With a small shake of his head he schooled his expression and poured himself another cup.

"Is it everything you thought it would be?" he asked, partially distracted.

She watched him uncertainly as he downed another cup. "The alcohol is worse than I thought it would be..."

"Oh, I'll finish that if you don't want it." He took her mostly full cup and poured its contents into his.

"Thanks?" Her forehead creased. "Maybe you should slow down a little."

He froze mid-sip and actually took stock of what he was doing.

In other words: He was being a really fucking rude date.

"Right. Sorry." He glanced at the remaining half of his drink and then at the bustling crowd in the next room. Bringing the cup to his lips, he tipped his head back and downed the foul drink. He set aside the empty cup and smiled sheepishly at Summer. "Last one. Promise."

He felt too warm from the inside out. Even though he'd opted for a light sweater, he was sweating like he had left his heavy winter coat on even though he had left it in his car.

"Steve, are you okay?"

Summer was staring at him with naked concern in her eyes.

"I-" he started to say before he broke off.

His gaze swung around the room, looking for a reason not to look his date in the eye. He landed on the last person he wanted to see. Billy Hargrove.

*Fuck.*

And what timing as the other boy caught his eye.

“Oh great. What does he want?” he grumbled under his breath as Billy began to move in his direction. His heart started to beat a little faster.

“What did you do to that guy to make him so...?” Summer trailed off as her face screwed up.

Steve would have laughed at her expression were it not for the well of anxiety boiling in his stomach. “I punched him and then it got a little out of hand. He basically broke my face.”

Summer stared at him, aghast. “What?”

Nervously, he tucked a loose strand of hair behind his ear. “Yeah, I could barely see out of my eye it was so fucked up. Did I mention he broke a plate over my head?”

“We can leave, if you want,” Summer offered and Steve was so paralyzed with indecision that he didn’t notice Billy fast approaching.

“Harrington,” Billy crooned as he sidled up to Steve and his date. “You here to finally challenge my crown so you can impress the new girl?”

He rolled his eyes at the other boy. “I don’t care about being ‘keg king’ or whatever. I’m just trying to show Summer a good time.”

After the words left his mouth he instantly realized what they sounded like. He shut his eyes as a wave of embarrassment washed over him and he missed the shark-like grin that split across Billy’s face.

Steve turned to Summer. “That’s not what I-” he began to explain when Billy suddenly clapped a hand on his shoulder and leaned in close to his ear, cutting him off.

“See, Harrington. There’s plenty of other bitches in the sea. I’m proud of you.”

Steve’s neck flushed and he roughly pulled away from Billy’s grip. His

eyes darted between the other boy and Summer, praying she hadn't fully heard what Billy said. She didn't appear especially pleased with the confrontation or the way Billy was leering at her and he felt a stab of guilt.

By now most of his classmates were staring at the three of them, eagerly awaiting for tensions to finally spill over. Steve remembered vividly how his last fight against Billy played out and the last thing he wanted was to go up against him again, especially in front of everyone he knew plus his date.

Feeling like the walls were closing in, he shakily raked a hand through his hair.

And then the most unexpected thing happened.

Summer jabbed a finger at the center of Billy's chest and with full eye contact, told him,

"Stop hurting Steve."

The people around them erupted in laughter as Steve looked on, absolutely stunned. Shit! He had to get his attention off of Summer just in case Billy snapped.

"Keep your crown Billy," Steve told Billy, fighting around a lump forming in his throat. "I don't want it."

Billy's mouth set in a hard line as his expression dulled.

"Steve?" Summer's hand found his as she peered up at him.

He gripped her hand tightly and turned away from Billy. "I need some air," he murmured breathlessly as he headed towards the exit.

He steadfastly ignored the jeers and taunts of his old teammates that followed him every step towards the door.

Cold air caressed his heated skin as soon as he went outside. It didn't help much because he still felt like he couldn't breathe as he clumsily fumbled for his car keys with one hand. Summer snatched the keys from him with her free hand and he stopped in the middle of the

driveway to look at her.

She said nothing for which he was immensely grateful as she gently tugged him to the passenger side of his car. He reluctantly got in. She quickly joined him on the driver's side.

Together they sat in the dark interior of his car and listened as his quick and shallow breaths began to settle.

He swallowed against the thickness in his throat as he drummed his fingers nervously against his thigh.

"I'm really sorry," he mumbled, ducking his head.

Summer didn't immediately reply and that caused Steve to finally lift his head so he could peer at her from beneath his lashes.

"It's okay." She smiled sweetly at him and he felt a little lighter. "I get panic attacks sometimes too."

His spine went rigid and his eyes widened. "Panic attack? What, no. That's- that's not what..." he trailed off, working his jaw.

She waited patiently for him to find whatever words eluded him. He just stared dumbly at her. The words to explain himself eluded him because he honestly had no idea what to say that didn't make him sound like he was going crazy.

"I'm so sorry about tonight," was all he could manage.

The corner of her mouth quirked up. "You don't have to apologize, Steve. I'll just take you home now, okay?"

Home sounded amazing right then. He regretted ever leaving his big empty house. His chest swelled with gratitude as Summer secured her seatbelt and prepared the car to leave.

"Wait," he found himself saying.

She looked at him, slightly confused.

He licked his lips.

“I...”

Maybe it was the residual adrenaline still coursing through his veins or maybe it was cheap booze making his mind buzz or probably a dangerous combination of the two, but he found himself *longing*.

“I really want to kiss you right now,” he admitted.

Her mouth fell open in surprise. “*Oh*.”

“I mean, I know we just met, like, a week ago. And I did kind of ruin your first high school party.” He chuckled nervously. “I probably should haven’t said anything and I will totally understand if you never want to talk to me again.

He watched avidly as her head slowly nodded once.

“Okay,” she whispered.

He tilted his head, confused. “Okay?”

Not wanting to spook her by surging forward suddenly, he approached her cautiously, giving her plenty of time to change her mind. But she didn’t pull away as he leaned toward her.

“Steve,” she breathed his name and goosebumps broke out across his flesh. “Kiss me.”

His hungry gaze dragged away from her twinkling eyes locked on parted lips and dragged down to her tempting mouth. They might have stared at each other’s lips a little bit too long to be decent. He couldn’t help but wait for the moment she inevitably pulled away and he wouldn’t blame her if she did. And yet, she never did.

Something finally broke between them and they both finally gave in. Steve melted into the kiss. Summer’s fingers curled into the fabric of his shirt and pulled him closer. He fought the urge to like-wise pull her ever closer and completely lose himself.

Her tongue swiped curiously across the seam of his mouth and he regretfully broke away. She blinked at him, puzzled, and as near as she was to him he could breathe in her shaky exhales as he panted.

“That wasn’t your first kiss, was it?” He worried his bottom lip as he searched her face.

She smirked at him and readjusted in her seat so there was once again breathing room between their seats. “No. It was not.”

He nodded dumbly. “Oh. Okay. Good. I was worried I might have ruined your first high school party *and* first kiss in one night.”

“You wouldn’t have ruined my first kiss, Steve,” she revealed cheekily before she shifted gears and pulled the car away from the curb. “On any night,” she added.

He grinned triumphantly.

*You still got it, Harrington,* he thought to himself smugly.

## 6. Billy

### Notes for the Chapter:

GUESS WHO JUST SAW THE BROKEN HEARTS GALLERY!

Me. It was me.

AND IT WAS SO GOOD 🤩

When Summer arrived at school the following monday she expected everything to be different. Well, not exactly *everything*, but at least *one thing*. Namely, Steve Harrington.

She had spent the entire weekend agonizing about their kiss and lamenting the fact that she hadn't asked for his phone number. Not that was able to call him even if she did have it. Chief Hopper, her now begrudging landlord/confidant, had explicitly warned her not to use the phone as it might still be bugged. That had led to a longer conversation about the incident of November 1983 and slew of other questions Hopper had been eager to escape from. He had kept his distance since then.

Luckily there were a few homework assignments she was able to distract herself with and ended up taking up much of the weekend. In between breaks though, she would carefully dissect and examine her last interaction with Steve...

Despite Steve's increasingly incoherent directions to his house as the booze hit him all at once, Summer was able to navigate the empty streets with little trouble.

The lights were on when she parked in the driveway but it seemed as though no one was home when Summer helped Steve inside.

"M sorry," he had mumbled when he collapsed on the couch in the huge living room, his arm tossed over his face and one leg splayed over the armrest. "I was gonna drive you home, 'swear."

She had stood there in the middle of his living room, looking around



with hardly concealed awkwardness, uncertain what to do next.

“You can stay the night if you want.”

Her eyes had landed on Steve. He had moved his arm to rest above his head and was actually looking at her with a soft, albeit bleary, gaze. He had looked tired and rumpled and her heart clenched at the sight. With his flushed face and pinched brow, his expression was so vulnerable and open. She felt almost embarrassed to catch him in such a state.

“I-” her voice caught in her throat and she realized she didn’t know what she was going to say.

“Your parents...?” she at last managed to wrangle some words with her slow tongue.

He shut his eyes when he heard the word ‘parents’ as though he was in pain. “Won’t be back ‘till monday night.”

She hadn’t known what to make of the disappointed undertone she probably wasn’t supposed to have heard in his voice. “Oh.”

He didn’t reopen his eyes and she could tell he was fading fast. “Guest room upstairs. To the right. Second door. Can’t miss it...”

A small smile played on her lips as he fell asleep right before her eyes. With silent steps she approached his sleeping form on the couch and reached over him for the throw draped along the back of the couch and tugged it over his body. He didn’t react, dead to the world.

“Good night, Steve.”

Boy, was he going to be hungover in the morning, she noted with a wince. She had half a mind to go rummaging through the kitchen, wherever that was, and get him a glass of water when he woke up, but she already felt like she was intruding enough as it was.

She found a lightswitch and flipped the lights in the living room off.

Making her way upstairs to the guest room on her own was bad enough, she half expected someone in Steve’s family to wildly appear

and demand to know what she was doing sneaking through their home. But the house was quiet and she could tell she was alone on the second floor.

She passed by a bedroom whose door was held slightly ajar. Impulsively, she peered through the crack into the room for a moment out of curiosity.

Plaid.

So. Much. Plaid.

Someone, probably Steve, had left a desk lamp on and her eyes swam at the way the plaid wallpaper blended in with the plaid curtains and the plaid bedspread. The grid-like pattern made the space seem so much smaller and enclosed. And even though she knew it was wrong, she pushed the door open and entered the room. She looked around the room, slowly taking in the trophies on the shelf, the books on the desk. Overdone plaid pattern notwithstanding, this was definitely Steve's room she noted. She wondered how he could stand to look at it for too long.

She switched off his light and closed the door behind her and crossed the hall to the guest room.

The night just got stranger.

Something woke her up in the middle of the night and when glanced at the illuminated hands on the clock set next to the bed. It was almost three in the morning. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes as she slipped from the bed. A noise had woken her up, she realized. It had come from down stairs. As she crept from the room she thought it had sounded like a shout or a cry.

She quickened her pace, feeling a little more awake as she hurried down the stairs.

"Steve?" she whispered.

The lights were on in the living room.

"S-summer?"

Steve looked startled when his wild gaze landed on her from where he crouched at the foot of the couch.

She glanced around the room warily, suddenly on alert for a lurking threat. “Are you okay? I thought I heard you cry out.” If there was a threat, she couldn’t find one.

Steve huffed, the sound an exhausted one. He dropped his face into his hands and groaned. “I, uh, had a nightmare. It’s nothing. You can go back to sleep,” he told her, his explanation slightly muffled by his hands.

She stared at him, mystified. “Oh. Okay.”

Except it didn’t *feel* okay to leave him when he was practically cowering on the floor and he couldn’t even look at her. She wanted to ask him if he wanted to talk about it. But she didn’t. They barely knew each other. Why the hell would he want to talk to her about whatever terrifying thing his psyche had conjured up that woke him up from a dead sleep screaming?

In the end, she turned around without another word and went back to the guest room. She thought she heard the tv turn on downstairs. It stayed on for the rest of the night.

In the morning Steve silently drove her home, his fingers drumming on the wheel, jittery from too much coffee. He stayed in the car while she got out and went inside. The entire interaction, or lack thereof, had been off. While the numerous assignments she needed to complete in order to catch up proved to distract her a little, the off feeling from before returned sevenfold when she got to school on monday.

She lingered at her locker for as long as was socially acceptable. Steve was a no show. Not that they had made any plans to meet at her locker but she knew it was one place he knew for sure where to find her. She looked for him in the hallways in between her classes. Nothing. She waited for him at their lunch table while dodging Nancy’s curious questions about her weekend. It was pretty obvious she had overheard the gossip circulating the school about what transpired between the two feuding kings of Hawkins High at the

party on friday night.

At long last, it was time for the one class she did have with Steve at the end of the day. Her heart quickened at the sight of him. He was late by a minute and he uttered a hasty apology to their exasperated teacher and his eyes glanced over her without acknowledgement as he made his way to the back of the classroom. Despite being packed in a room full of people, she felt woefully cold.

The class dragged on to the point of torture and she spent the entire time ignoring the teacher and trying to sneak glances behind where Steve sat at the back of the room. To her great relief, the class finally ended and she rushed to gather her materials so she could talk to him.

Steve raced past her before she could even hope to flag him down.

That's when it became glaringly clear to her that he was avoiding her.

Crestfallen, she shuffled towards her locker to grab her coat and paused. She stood there, staring into the empty abyss of her locker clutching her textbooks to her chest, and thinking back to what went wrong.

Did Steve...regret their kiss? Did he not like her after all?

She had never had never been in a relationship before and was only familiar with what she saw in movies and TV. Her childhood after escaping The Bad Men hadn't exactly been conducive to her social development. There were probably key aspects and subtle hints she had missed. But even she knew her first date with Steve hadn't been ideal! Maybe...maybe he was right to avoid her.

"Hey, are you okay?"

She looked up, startled, and realized her eyes were wet with tears. She ducked her head and swiped at her eyes before looking back to who had approached her locker. Billy Hargrove leaned casually with his text books under his arm against the locker beside hers with a sympathetic expression.

"I'm fine," she lied.

He raised a challenging brow. "That why you're crying?"

Unable to hold his gaze, she fixed her eyes on his leather jacket. It didn't look warm enough for the cold Indiana weather but she refrained from mentioning it.

"Did you need something?" she asked instead.

He cocked his head, gaze searching her face. "Just wanted to make sure you were alright. I know how hard being the new kid can be. It's Summer, right?"

"Yeah. And I already know who you are." She slammed her locker shut with a huff. "I'll be fine."

He chuckled, immediately falling into step with her as she started towards the exit. "Hey, I believe you."

She glanced at him from the corner of her eye. "Good."

He smirked. They approached the doors and he graciously held one open for her.

"So. Trouble in paradise, already?" he asked rudely as she passed him through the door.

She spun on her heel and glared at him as he crossed the threshold. "That is none of your business."

His tongue swiped over his full bottom lip and his eyes gleamed with mischief before softening with a semblance of sincerity.

"Don't waste your tears on Steve Harrington. The guy's an idiot if he can't see how good he's got it."

Her eyes widened with surprise.

He stepped closer to her and she had half a mind to back away except she was rooted to spot as he advanced on her and leaned into her space to murmur into her ear in that sinful low register of his, "If you

were with me, I'd never take you for granted."

A shiver ran down her spine, though not from the cold wintry air, and instead left her hot and bothered.

Billy retreated slowly, taking in her flustered expression with satisfied, hooded eyes she could get lost in.

"When you decide to ditch Harrington I'll be waiting."

Her brows snapped together and she opened her mouth to tell him...Well, she actually wasn't sure what she was going to say. Her mouth was dry and any words she wanted to express eluded the speech center of her brain. She was frozen in place, caught in Billy's game. He sounded so sure she was going to abandon Steve and after the way he avoided her that day, she was slightly inclined to. Let him see how it feels...

A voice rang out across the parking lot, breaking the spell. "HEY! LET'S GO ALREADY! IT'S FREEZING OUT HERE, BILLY!"

His expression soured and he glared daggers at whoever dare step on his moment. Summer turned to get a look at this person and spotted a short redhead loitering next to Billy's car. She raised a brow and glanced back at Billy.

"ONE MINUTE!" he hollered back, his deep voice tinged with annoyance.

He schooled his expression when he looked to Summer, effortlessly shedding his obvious annoyance for the suave devil was a moment ago.

"Don't mind her. It's just my step-sister. She never learned any manners." He smiled in a way that said 'what can you do?'

Summer couldn't help the way the corner of her mouth quirked up in return. "Right. See you tomorrow, Billy."

She spun on her heel and made her way to her car, hearing his earlier words echoing in her brain.

*If you were with me, I'd never take you for granted.*

*When you decide to ditch Harrington I'll be waiting.*

## 7. Steve

### Summary for the Chapter:

“And you’ve been ignoring her...why, again?” Dustin asked him in exasperation.

How they got onto the topic of Steve’s current love-life was beyond him.

### Notes for the Chapter:

Here's another unbeta-ed chapter like always! Happy Holiday's everybody!

When Steve arrived at school the following monday he hadn’t expected everything to be so different.

He had never gone out of his way to avoid *anyone*. Especially a girl. And yet, he found himself ducking into classrooms that weren’t his and hiding in large crowds if he caught so much as a glance of Summer. He was able to keep this up until the last class of the day. The only class he had with her. For a frantic, heart pounding moment, he thought about skipping it all together but he knew that would mean his parents would get a phone call about his tardiness. He would never hear the end of it.

He waited until he was sure the classroom was filled up and all the good seats were taken by the time he breezed in. Making his way to the back of the classroom, he felt Summer’s gaze zero in on him and he steadfastly avoided making eye contact as he passed by her desk. His stomach was in knots the entire class.

Ten minutes before the class had ended, Steve had his things packed away and as much as he hated to admit it, he ran away as soon as the bell sounded.

*This is low. Even for you, Harrington,* he thought darkly to himself on the mad dash to his car.

The rest of the week went pretty much the same as that monday.



Always looking over his shoulder. Ducking into the wrong classroom. Arriving late to class. Rinse and repeat.

It was killing him.

His parents being home did not help. In fact, he spent most of his time holed up in his room, too lethargic to bother getting out of bed for anything except for food. Dodging his parents questions about his slothful behavior were just as exhausting as avoiding Summer.

But what really bothered him was how the class that they shared she never once made the effort to confront him.

It wouldn't be that difficult to save the seat next to her! To force him to sit next to her! Everyday he kept expecting that very outcome and yet she never bothered. Steve didn't know what to think. Obviously he knew that this was what he had originally wanted; for Summer to understand that he was an asshole and she was better off without him.

And yet, he couldn't help the self-loathing that had steadily mounted as the days passed.

Everytime he accidentally met her eye in class, in the halls, in the parking lot, he would watch her expression fall as though every time she saw him it reminded her of something sad and it consequently added extra weight to the guilt he carried.

Dustin was able to pick up in his shift in mood very quickly.

"And you've been ignoring her...why, again?" Dustin asked him in exasperation.

How they got onto the topic of Steve's current love-life was beyond him.

He also didn't know how the preteen had managed to convince him to drive him to the arcade to meet the rest of the party...and then coax him inside while he waited and then swindled a handful of quarters out of him too!

Steve groaned as Dustin played his game, the bright graphics flashing

colors across their faces.

“I have not been *ignoring* her,” he argued. One look at Dustin’s unconvinced expression had Steve caving in seconds. “...I’ve been *avoiding* her. Slight difference.”

Dustin rolled his eyes quickly before refocusing on the screen. “Okay. And you’ve been ‘avoiding’ her, why exactly?”

Steve exhaled deeply, gaze darting away. He didn’t want to explain himself because that would lead to confessing just how shitty he had been lately. Part of him was envious at how well “The Party” was holding up after everything that went down in the tunnels. He still couldn’t sleep without the lights on and even then he struggled with the occasional night terror.

“I’m just not ready to jump into anything relationship-wise. And I don’t want to hurt her feelings like...”

“Like Nancy?” Dustin finished for him causing a slight flinch from Steve, which thankfully the preteen hadn’t seen.

Steve cast his gaze around helplessly, taking in the rows of arcade machines and the various patrons scattered around the arcade.

“The last thing I want is to lead her on. This seemed like the best way to handle it.” He didn’t sound convincing even to himself.

Dustin huffed, obviously growing frustrated with him. “If you didn’t want to lead her on, you probably shouldn’t have asked her to that party. And you definitely shouldn’t have kissed her!”

Only Dustin could weasel that information out of him, Steve thought wryly. Though, it wasn’t like he had a whole lot of other people he could talk to about girls anymore.

He raked a hand through his messy hair, agitated by what he was about to ask the preteen.

“How do I fix this Henderson?”

Dustin clapped a hand on Steve’s shoulder, the screen boasting a new

high score though his attention was solely on him now, and adopted the most sincere expression of wisdom.

“You need to talk to her, dude. Explain yourself and let her have the final word.”

Steve blinked, completely shocked by the younger teen. That...had actually sounded like sound advice. He felt a little inadequate in the wake of such a mature response from someone who had been in zero relationships so far.

What was he supposed to say after something like that?

He nodded his head slowly. “Okay.”

Dustin nodded back at him.

Something occurred to Steve then.

“Are the others even coming here? Or did you just want to make me drive you so you didn’t have to ride your bike.”

Dustin cringed. “Well, The Party was planning to meet here today, but at the last minute...”

Steve snorted. “Dude.”

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For once, it wasn’t the terror of his inevitable nightmares that kept Steve up all night. Instead, he was wrought with nerves about what the fuck he was supposed to say to Summer, that is if she was even willing to hear him out. She had every right not to and Steve couldn’t blame her. Plus, he knew he wasn’t very good with words and what words could possibly forgive his many faults?

He knew he couldn’t just beg her to take him back. That hadn’t worked with Nancy and it was just a bad plan to begin with. No, he needed to man up and spill his guts so they could both move on.

Before the first rays of dawn could wake his parents, he was up and in his car on the way to school. Just as planned, he was the first to

arrive besides a few teachers who one after another shot his car sideways glances in curiosity as they headed into the building. He offered an awkward closemouthed smile to a few of them that he was unlucky enough to make eye contact with. Whatever. He was determined to wait until he spotted Summer's car.

As his classmates started to arrive one by one, he was starting to doubt his poorly thought out plan. It kinda felt like he was waiting to ambush the poor girl. Which was obviously the wrong way to handle this. He needed to wait for her to make the first move so they could be on somewhat equal footing. But what if she never did? It was what he deserved after all.

He needed; what was the expression? Something to do with olives? Or branches? Did olives grow on branches? Dustin would know what he was talking about. The point was, he needed a better plan.

Suddenly, a loud **thunk** had Steve yelping an undignified sound and jumping in his seat. His head snapped to the driver's side window, eyes bugging out of his head, his heart in his throat. Half expecting a demo-dog clawing at the glass, it's giant flower bud head splitting open to bare its sharp toothed maw, he paled at the equally unexpected sight of scowling Billy Hargrove.

"You're gonna be late, pretty boy." Billy's gruff, deep tenor cut through the glass just as effectively and terrifying as a demo-dog. And then before Steve could even get a flustered word out, even though all speech had abandoned him in that moment, Billy was already retreating without so much as a glance back.

He watched the other boy stride across the parking lot and into the building in utter bewilderment for a moment as his heart rate returned to its normal pace. In fact, he was so stunned by the whole interaction that it took a moment for it to register that he was about to miss the last bell!

Grappling wildly for his stuff, he scrambled out of his car and sprinted towards the building. The entire way he wondered was this the day Billy finally retaliated for stealing his car and getting tranqed? (Well, technically the kids had been responsible for all of that while he was too unconscious to stop them but he doubted Billy

much cared.)

The rest of the day Steve doubled down on his efforts to avoid not just Summer, but Billy as well.

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Steve surprised himself towards the end of the day and most likely everyone else in his last class of the day.

He made sure he was the first person to arrive for the last period, much to his teacher's chagrin, and he purposely claimed the seat next to him for good measure. The idea was probably a long shot but he couldn't think of another way for Summer to see that he was finally willing to reach out, if that was something she even wanted. If she didn't...well, he wasn't going to force her to acknowledge his gesture.

As the class slowly began to fill up his resolve slowly crumbled into seat squirming, leg fidgeting anxiety.

A storm of worried thoughts buzzed around in his head like angry hornets.

Was this enough?

What if she was completely done with him?

Or worse! What if she did want to talk?

Beyond thinking of this stupid idea, he had not planned ahead of it at all.

And now he didn't have any time to contemplate what a monumental idiot he was because Summer was walking into the classroom and staring right at him.

He wrestled with his anxiety and fought to hold eye contact. This was his only shot to communicate that he wanted a second chance and he was not going to throw it away because he was half convinced he didn't deserve one.

She hesitated at the front of the room and had started to attract a

couple of curious stares from the already seated students in the first row. Steve wasn't positive that that was a good sign. His apprehension spiked when she took the first step towards the back of the room where he usually sat. For a heart breaking moment he thought she was going for her usual seat by the window until she passed right by the empty desk.

He knew his disbelief was written all over his face but he couldn't help it.

Summer hovered in front of his desk, her books clutched to her chest like a shield. She glanced at the desk next to him to his things strewn across the surface of it and then back to him.

"Is this seat taken?" she asked.

Steve wanted to pump his fists in the air and shout in victory!

Instead he cleared his throat and shook his head, totally nonchalant. "It's all yours."

She beamed and he scrambled to switch desks. Their teacher called the class to attention as he settled into place next to Summer. He opened his notebook to a blank page and scribbled a message to show her.

*Can we talk after class?*

He thought his heart would burst when she nodded yes.

## 8. After Class

### Notes for the Chapter:

This is a real short chapter :'(

I'm so sorry but I'm trying to save all the good stuff for the next chappie which is hopefully much longer!

The school emptied out pretty quickly after the last bell. It was just Steve and Summer left. He knew that. He knew they were alone. So why did he feel like at any moment secret government agents were about to burst through the doors at the end of the hallway and drag him off to prison?

Summer watched him carefully, not saying anything as he stuttered and struggled to find the words to explain himself.

“So...what happened that night...I, I mean, well,” he trailed off, a ball of nerves choking him.

He didn't know where to look. His gaze continuously swept up and down the hallway, searching for the slightest hint that someone was eavesdropping. Fuck! Was he shaking? His hand was definitely shaking as he ran it through his hair.

Damn it. He really hadn't thought this through.

“Um, okay so, first of all I am really sorry about...avoiding you,” he attempted to grin sheepishly, but the expression turned more into a pained grimace. “I was...scared.”

He winced, uncertain of how Summer would receive his apology and half-assed explanation.

She cocked her head to the side and raised a skeptic brow. “Scared of what in particular?”

He swallowed nervously. “S-scared is a strong word actually. Let's say I was more...worried? About what you might think about me?”

She sucked on her bottom lip and nodded thoughtfully. The gesture alone made his thoughts careen to the now blurry memory of kissing those lips. He realized how badly he wanted to kiss her again, sober.

His face heated.

“Are you going to ask me now?” she interrupted his salacious train of thought.

He blinked at her owlshly. “Ask you?” The tips of his ears were turning red now.

“What I think of you,” she affirmed.

His eyes went round.

“Oh,” he said weakly. “Right. What, uh, what *do* you think of me. You know, after everything?”

He folded his arms across his chest, bracing for her reply. There was no way she had anything good to say. Not after the way he acted and how he treated her.

He ducked his head so he didn’t have to look her in the eye when she inevitably insulted him.

“I think you’re hiding something.”

He snapped his head back up.

Did she...? Did she *know*? Was she actually another high school student...or was she actually working for Hawkin’s Lab sent to keep an eye on all of them?

His heart rate picked up like he’d received an electric shock.

Wait, no. That was ridiculous, he tried to convince himself.

As he searched Summer’s expression, he tried to reign in his paranoia. She wasn’t a spy. She was just a really perceptive person. He thought back to the night of the party when he’d completely shut down and run outside because he felt like he couldn’t breathe. In his



car she'd said "*It's okay.*" And then she smiled sweetly at him and breathing got a little bit easier. "*I get panic attacks sometimes too.*"

Why hadn't he picked up on that sooner? Maybe he wasn't the only one who was hiding something.

"I want to explain. *Really* explain. But I," he chuckled and cast his eyes heavenward. "I signed some papers and I'm actually not *allowed* to tell anyone. Legally, anyway. Plus, I wouldn't even know where to begin if I did tell you."

He suddenly remembered where he was. At school. In the real world. A place where normal people didn't have to sign legal documents assuring the government that you wouldn't shout from the rooftops how extra-dimensional creatures almost killed everyone a couple months ago.

"Look I know how that sounds, but I swear I am not bullshitting you right now," he rushed to add.

Clearing his throat, he looked to Summer to assess her reaction but her veiled expression was inscrutable.

A beat passed and he began to fear that she did not believe him and he couldn't blame her. *I'm not legally allowed to explain why I'm such a fuck up* was such a cop out and sounded totally bogus.

Finally, she exhaled sharply like she was preparing to say something but the words never followed.

He watched her carefully as she bit her lip, suddenly appearing uncertain.

Her brow furrowed as her obvious frustration mounted. "I could make you tell me. But..."

She glanced down the hallway and he followed her line of sight. The basketball team was starting to assemble at the end of the corridor. She knew just as well as he did that this was not the place to be having this conversation.

"Can we," he started to say before his brain caught up with his mouth

and he realized he actually had no idea what he was about to ask.

She looked back at him and he was struck by how willing she was to listen to him.

“Uh, can we table this for now? I promise I’ll explain later. I just need some time to figure out *how*.”

Her expression had become unreadable again and he had no way of gauging how well she was taking this.

It surprised him when she nodded in understanding. “Okay,” she said softly and it would never cease to amaze him just how *gentle* she was with him. He knew he didn’t deserve it, but he was grateful nonetheless.

He beamed. “Then, can I walk you to your car?”

Her mouth curved into a smile. “Yes please.”

“Cool,” he said and offered her his hand to which she shyly took.

Little did they know, at the end of the corridor amongst the congregating basketball players, Billy watched their retreating backs as they made their way outside with a baleful eye.

## 9. The Game

Things between them had been going really well for the past couple of weeks.

Steve and Summer walked each other to classes, had lunch together, and every saturday they went on a date. Granted, in a little town like Hawkins there wasn't a whole lot to do but Steve always managed to make everything they did seem special. He would pick her up and drive her around town, showing her his favorite spots, however few they might be.

The last date they went on was to a home basketball game; her first ever and it was absolutely thrilling even though Steve seemed a little on edge the entire time. From what she understood, they weren't doing so hot in the beginning. Actually both teams were neck and neck for most of the game. The Hawkins team just barely managed to steal a win. So far that was her favorite date of all. It was like she was a normal teenager doing normal teenager things.

As the game ended, the crowded gym started to clear out but they lingered behind as Steve patiently answered her various questions about the game.

Alone on the bleachers Steve cracked a wry grin that made her blush. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say this was the first time you've ever watched a basketball game *anywhere*," he chuckled.

She smiled and rolled her eyes. "That's because it is. I'm not really interested in sports."

He seemed surprised by her answer. "Seriously? Because you were really into *this* game."

She shrugged her shoulders and made to stand now that the gym was nearly empty. "It was a good game. Wasn't it?"

Steve was quick to follow her lead and offered her a hand as they descended from the bleachers together. "Yeah," he relented.

She glanced at him from the corner of her eyes curiously. If she didn't know any better she'd say there was more he wanted to say but didn't. Absently, she wondered if it had anything to do with one Billy Hargrove who was arguably the star of the evening since he was the one who almost single handedly carried the Hawkins team to victory.

If she was being honest with herself she'd have to admit that she'd been fixated on him the entire game. She'd even caught Steve staring when he thought she wasn't looking and she couldn't blame him. The other boy's presence on the court simply demanded everyone's attention.

Speaking of the devil...

There he was almost as though he was waiting for them, stubbing out a half smoked cigarette and tucking it behind his ear.

They must have lingered in the gym longer than she thought at the sight of a freshly showered Billy squeezed back into his street clothes.

"Great," Steve muttered under his breath, low enough Summer suspected she wasn't supposed to have heard him.

A rakish smile spread across Billy's full lips.

"Enjoy the game?"

Her face felt warm and she struggled to hold eye contact as he flashed his baby blues in her direction.

"It was a good game, Hargrove." Steve begrudgingly admitted.

Billy's eyes glinted with amusement. He readjusted his grip on the handle of his gym bag slung over his shoulder. Summer noted that he wasn't dressed warm enough for a chilly winter evening.

"You know, Summer, Harrington used to be on the team. 'Course they didn't start winning until he quit," he teased.

Summer expected Steve to tense and rise to the bait like he did before at the party. Maybe it was because he was sober and it was just the three of them out in the parking lot, but Steve remained collected

and calm. Summer smiled to herself.

“Baseball was more my thing.”

Billy raised a surprised brow, though Summer couldn't be sure if it was surprise from Steve's lack of reaction or the information he'd shared.

“That so? You thinking about playing in the spring? Maybe I'll join you.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “Don't hold your breath Hargrove.”

He squeezed her hand and she sensed the end of their brief conversation approaching.

“What about you?”

Her eyes widened. Billy's gaze was fixed firmly on her, just as it had been the last time he'd caught her on the front steps of the school. Butterflies fluttered in her stomach.

“Did you enjoy the game?”

His eyelashes were unfairly lush. She wanted to sigh.

“I enjoyed watching you play,” she found herself confessing.

Billy chuckled, either at Steve's poorly concealed exasperation or her answer, or she guessed probably at both.

“You should come to all my games then.”

Grinning, she shook her head at his blatant flirting. The blond was absolutely shameless and he knew it. Revelled in it.

“Goodnight, Billy. We'll see you at school,” she dismissed him and his opaque attempts to drive a wedge between her and Steve.

“We?” he echoed in a half-mocking tone. He sized them up with a new critical eye. Steve tightened his grip on her hand, his palm warm and sweaty. Billy's eyes narrowed.

“Are you two a thing now?”

She cut off Steve when she noted how he bristled at the question. “Do you have a problem with that, Billy?”

He scoffed and it was his turn to roll his eyes. “How could I, when you two look so good together?” he retorted.

His gaze did not return to them. Instead he looked towards the rest of the parking lot and then to where his blue camaro was parked. Really, just anywhere they weren’t almost as though he were avoiding looking at them.

Steve shuffled his feet, increasingly ansty. “Bye, Billy. Good Game.”

He tugged on her hand, attempting to lead her away. She noticed how the blond boy’s nostrils flared and jaw tightened with hidden rage as they parted ways.

\*\*\*

The following Monday the school was buzzing with rumors. Summer was only interested in two of them.

1. Steve “The Hair” Harrington found a rebound girl (Summer), who was also the new girl, after Nancy left him for the “zombie boy”(?)’s brother a month ago.

2. Someone beat the shit out of Billy Hargrove.

Naturally, she was confused by these rumors for a number of reasons though most of them related to the first rumor. Like, why did it seem like people were trying to make Nancy some kind of bad guy? And who was the “zombie boy”?

As for the second rumor... she knew the truth of it as soon as she saw Billy and how closely he guarded his side. How he winced when he turned or twisted too far. It was apparent how stiffly he moved compared to his usual easy going saunter that always managed to captivate her.

She knew someone had hit him hard enough that it was meant to

hurt and somewhere that wasn't meant to be obvious. Or, at least it wouldn't have been obvious if everyone in his gym class hadn't seen the bruises in the locker room earlier.

Summer could only remember a couple years in the lab before she made her escape, most of which was filled with abuse she suffered at the hands of the bad men that escorted her to and from experiments. That is to say, she knew better than to assume another student had given Billy those bruises. The nature of his newfound defensiveness was hardly the result of just a blow to his ego. Whoever hurt him cut a little deeper.

"What are you staring at?" Steve asked playfully as he sidled up to her at her locker. The lazy grin on his face faded once he followed her intent stare.

"He's hurt," she murmured.

"The guy probably gets into fights all the time. That's nothing new," Steve argued.

She faced Steve and shook her head. "This feels different."

Uncertainty twisted his uncomfortable expression. She knew he was in the same gym class as Billy. He might have even seen the bruises everyone was talking about first hand.

"Actually, I wanted to talk about thursday," he attempted to change the subject.

Slightly disappointed, her eyes traced back to Billy as he shambled alone down the hallway, expression dark and full of warning for everyone to stay out of his way.

"Thursday?" she asked absently.

"Valentine's Day."

Her gaze shot back to Steve. "Oh. Right." She mustered a smile.

She knew what Valentine's Day was, in theory. Even after she escaped the bad men she hadn't found or felt much of a need to

celebrate the holiday. But, if it was for Steve... she felt a little more inclined to embrace new traditions.

He smiled bashfully and it made her heart skip a beat. "My parents are going away this weekend to celebrate. I was thinking, if you wanted, we could wait until they're gone... and you could come over maybe? We'd have the whole place to ourselves... Or we could do something on the actual day too if that sounds better. We don't have to do anything, uh, big. Heh. We could just hang out somewhere."

At this point he was leaning against the wall of lockers, hunched over trying to make himself seem smaller and she realized he was extremely nervous. If she said the wrong thing here it would probably devastate him.

She bit her lip, suddenly just as nervous.

She could mention that she had the trailer that she was basically house-sitting for the sheriff all to herself all the time, but she was particularly reluctant to share that space with anyone, even Steve. Not to mention, it would inevitably lead to questions she couldn't answer.

"I would like to hang out. Somewhere. Nothing big," she assented.

Steve beamed at her, straightening up, and she felt as though she had said the right thing after all.

"No problem!"

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

It all comes out on Valentine's day ya'll.



## 10. Will you be our Valentine?

### Summary for the Chapter:

#### Billy's POV

On Valentine's day 1985, Billy Hargrove would finally admit to himself that he was jealous.

He was jealous for two related reasons. One; he was jealous of how quickly Steve Harrington managed to snatch up the new girl before he even had a chance. And two; he was jealous of how protective Summer was of Harrington even though his current social status was in the shitter. And thirdly, because why the fuck not, he was jealous that they had each other and all he had on Valentine's day was the fading bruises from when Neil let him know he had to watch his psycho step sister so he could take Susan out.

Sure there were plenty of girls that approached him hopefully for a date in anticipation of the holiday but between the soreness from the beating he got for talking back and his ego, he wasn't in the fucking mood to even pretend he was interested. No, the only thing occupying his attention lately was someone else's relationship. How pathetic was that?

Maybe because he was a glutton for punishment or maybe he simply couldn't help himself, he approached Summer at her locker in between classes.

He offered his most winning smile and got a little thrill when he thought he spotted a blush high on her cheeks. "Happy Valentine's day, Summer."

She cast him a furtive glance. "Happy Valentine's Day, Billy," she replied coolly.

He really liked that about her. How quickly she regained her composure. He wanted nothing more than to find out what it would take to break that composure.

His winning smile turning sly, he stated boldly, “You and Harrington are probably doing something romantic for the holiday, I’m assuming.”

She paused briefly and then reached into her locker for a binder. “We’re just going to hang out. Somewhere. Nothing big.”

He raised a brow at her vagueness.

Was she purposefully withholding their plans or were they genuinely not doing anything interesting?

She had yet to face him at all during their conversation, too preoccupied with the contents of her locker and he could tell he was making her curious about his reason behind speaking with her on today of all days.

“Harrington must be off his game if he thinks ‘just hanging out’ is gonna cut it on Valentine’s Day.”

Finally, Summer glanced his way again.

His eyes sparkled gleefully from her attention.

She turned away from her locker and faced him fully, the metal locker door creaking open wide enough for him to catch sight of the bouquet of flowers propped up on the shelf inside. He hoped she didn’t catch how he faltered slightly at the sight.

“What would ‘cut it’?” she asked him, confused, tearing him away from the impressive looking display of flora.

*Well he’s definitely got a bouquet of roses down,* Billy thought bitterly to himself feeling wretched.

Summer was still waiting for an answer, though, so he wrenched himself out of a downward spiral and forced himself to look into her eyes.

Nothing about his own eyes or his carefully curated expression gave away what he was really feeling, he made sure of it.

"Forget Harrington. If it were me taking you out, I *know* we would have some real fun," he answered with certainty and a rakish grin.

What he didn't say is that they would have double the fun if Harrington was there too. After all, his favorite thing to do was teasing the guy.

Was he imagining things or did she actually look somewhat tempted?

He *had* to have imagined it because the next thing he knew, she was squaring up to give him a piece of her mind. It was just like that night at the party when she told him to stop hurting Harrington. A dam or something inside himself collapsed when she did that and whatever was being held back started rushing through him.

Just like back then, a look of fierce determination took residence on her face and suddenly he couldn't look away. He was pinned in place, waiting to hear what she had to say with rapt attention.

"Stop trying to steal me away from Steve," she told him.

He wanted to recoil with the wrongness of her command.

He wasn't trying to steal her away from Steve!

Was he?

His tongue felt thick and swollen in his mouth and he struggled to find words of protest or any words for that matter. There was no way for him to explain his tangled feelings because she had it all wrong. At least, he was pretty sure she did. Not that it mattered because Summer had already said what she needed to and was walking away as though nothing strange had just occurred.

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His day only got better when Max asked him for a favor. Well, it wasn't really a favor.

"I need a ride tonight."

Neil and Susan had just left for their date night, which is exactly

when the little brat decided to strike.

He didn't even bother sparing her sideways glance when he replied with a firm, "No."

That should have been the end of it but of fucking course not.

Max's face screwed up in clear frustration and her hands became fists balled at her sides. "You owe me," she reminded him.

He suddenly spun to face her, his nostrils flaring as his temper steadily rose. (He was a little impressed that she didn't flinch this time.)

"I don't owe you *shit*," he spat venomously.

*He was the one who took the beating from Harrington AND his dad BECAUSE of her.*

If anyone owe anybody anything, it was Max who owed him.

And then he watched her just her chin out so her face was angled to stare at him down her nose all sanctimonious.

"You owe Lucas."

Fuck.

And that was how he ended up driving his conniving little step sister to a date at the arcade.

\*\*\*

He told her a hundred times on the drive to her stupid extortion date that she could only stay for forty minutes. He told her not to be fucking late. She swore she wouldn't be. Apparently none of that mattered because Neil and Sharon *still* managed to beat them home.

\*\*\*

He didn't go to school the next day. The bruises would take a three day weekend to fade enough.

He tried to tell himself that it had been worth it, that one gesture of

kindness for a boy that hadn't deserved how Billy had treated him the first time they met. (He was only half convinced in the end.)

\*\*\*

By Saturday he busted out of the house, feeling like he was gonna burst out of his skin from the tension that permeated through the small house.

He drove aimlessly around town until he found himself on the outskirts and maybe even a little lost. The sun began to set and he decided to park somewhere until he was ready to pay the piper and go home. There was nothing around him except a quarry of some kind and he ended up parked on a rocky beach in front of a small frozen lake. He turned off his car and sat in silence. As the darkness and the cold crept in, he chainsmoked his way through half a box of cigarettes and tried not to let his mind wander.

He wondered what Summer and Steve were doing right now for their casual valentine's day. (He bet they were fucking and experienced a mess of emotions he wasn't in the mood to decipher.)

And then, as if he had summoned them with his impure imaginings, a pair of headlights hit the back of his head before coming around the side of his car. He turned to his right and there they were, staring at him through their passenger side window.

He watched with held breath as Summer timidly got out of Harrington's beamer and knocked on his window. His brain took a moment to comprehend what she wanted. Eventually it clicked and he cranked his window all the way down and finally took a breath.

"Do you want to sit with us?" She asked him.

What the hell had he done to deserve this? He wondered.

Of course, he knew *exactly* what he had done to deserve. Just one glance at Harrington's tense expression was reminder enough of where they stood with each other. Too bad that wasn't enough to stop him from abandoning his freezing car for their warm and toasty one.

Now, they were all squeezed in the backseat with Harrington on the far left and him on the right and Summer seated in the middle between them. The tension made him slightly uncomfortable, like the car was filling up with poisonous accusation and judgment.

He had already been in a foul mood all day and the ensuing claustrophobia was a push too far and he took a breath to make a nasty comment meant to insult and hurt.

He suddenly froze, his body locking up as though some unseen force psychically held him back. Even he looked confused by his own strange behavior. All the while Summer watched him curiously and maybe even knowingly? It was almost as though she knew something he didn't but was pleased all the same.

"This feels weird," Harrington chuckled uneasily.

Somewhat glad someone mentioned it, Billy rolled his eyes. "You said it."

Summer said nothing to this, merely content to observe the two males.

Steve drummed his fingers on his fidgeting leg. "I, uh, I heard what you did for Max and Lucas on Valentine's day. That was really nice of you."

Billy nearly startled at the unexpected praise. Fighting to keep his expression neutral, he shrugged and looked away, suddenly finding the darkness outside a lot more interesting.

"Little brat tricked me," he lied.

Steve turned to look at him with a dubious raised brow. "Yeah. Right. You still didn't have to. But you did anyway."

God damn did Harrington have the heater cranked to the max? The back seat was sweltering.

He worked his jaw, unused to the kind of attention Harrington was offering him. Not to mention he already felt like a bug pinned down under Summer's inquisitive gaze.

“It’s whatever.”

Harrington smirked. “Maybe you’re not so bad after all.”

“I think he’s a good person,” Summer spoke up finally. “When he wants to be,” she added thoughtfully.

Billy wasn’t sure how to respond to that.

“Thanks?”

She just smiled at him in return, not saying anything. The trio fell into an awkward silence. None of them were used to this. Simply being together, no posturing or antagonizing.

Billy didn’t want to let his guard down and accidentally start to bask in the couple’s welcoming presence.

He drummed his fingers on his bouncing leg, anxiety starting to eat away at him as sweat started to collect on his forehead.

“Why am I here?” he suddenly demanded.

Harrington shifted in his seat, uncomfortable. “Well, *we* came here because we thought we’d be alone. *Why*, uh, are you here exactly?”

Billy rolled his eyes at the other boy. “That’s not what I meant and you fucking know it.”

Summer sighed loudly, immediately catching both their attention. She leaned heavily against the backrest and turned her head to face Billy. Her posture was open and totally at ease and the effect she had on him was instantly disarming.

“Do you have a Valentine’s Billy?” she asked him with genuine curiosity.

He blinked, dumbfounded by her seemingly random question.

“Uh, no?”

Without looking away from Billy, she laced her fingers with Harrington who watched them both with confusion that matched his own.

“Will you be our Valentine?”

“*Our?*” Steve and Billy echoed each other.

They looked at each other then and Billy was forced to feel things he really didn’t want to acknowledge when Summer was still there expecting some kind of answer.

Fuck. Why did Harrington’s eyes have to be so distracting? He was so pretty it wasn’t fair.

“Okay.”

Wait, did he just say that out loud?

Summer beamed at him and his gaze was temporarily torn away. Jesus Christ they were both so pretty and he was so fucking screwed. There was no way he could have them both.

But she had said ‘our’. Not ‘mine’. Not ‘his’. OUR.

Maybe. Just maybe. He could allow himself to hope instead of wish.

“Do you want to kiss me?” she asked him suddenly and blew his fucking mind.

His gaze flicked to Harrington to weigh his reaction. Maybe the heat was really starting to get to him because he could have sworn Harrington’s pupils dilated some.

He cleared his throat and shifted again. “Uh, Summer?”

She turned to him and gauged the growing uncertainty of his furrowed brow and crooked grin. “Do you trust me?”

His grin faltered some but he nodded nonetheless and she pressed a chaste kiss to his pouting mouth.



She turned back to the other boy. "Billy?"

Billy had a sort of out of body experience then. It was like he was watching someone else's hands reach out and cup Summer's face. The entire time he waited for the inevitable to happen, for Steve to finally snap out of the warm bubble they had all found themselves in. The closer he leaned into Summer's space, the sooner he expected Steve to speak up, say something, *do* something. Anything. Punch him in the face again maybe.

And yet.

He was kissing Summer and everything was perfect. Her lips were soft and gentle against his own and he couldn't believe where he was and what was happening and who was there with him. His fingers curled into Summer's long hair and he remembered Steve was right fucking there just watching them.

He reluctantly pulled away from Summer, licking the wetness from his lips. He heard the other boy gulp audibly and he couldn't help himself as he smirked devilishly at Steve. Summer giggled cutely and slapped playfully at his shoulder.

"Do you want to kiss Steve now?" she asked him and he thought he was going to have a god damn heart attack.

Steve blushed at his girlfriend's question. "W-what?"

Billy stared into Summer's eyes, shocked. She held his gaze purposefully and a strange feeling fell over him.

"You can tell the truth," she said purposefully.

*No. He really couldn't tell the truth.* The truth likely would ruin his entire fucking life if anyone outside of this car found out. It was one thing to kiss Summer. He'd kissed another guy's girlfriend before, usually without the other guy finding out though. And yeah he'd kissed other guys before, but in California. Hawkins was not California.

"I-" he started and then broke off, struggling with himself. Summer's voice was echoing in the cramped backseat, ringing in his burning

ears.

He closed his eyes because this wasn't happening and she did not just ask him that.

He knew he should just lie. Just say no. But she said he could tell the truth...

SHIT. He was taking too long to answer. Why was lying so difficult?

"Steve, do you want Billy to kiss you?"

Billy's eyes snapped open.

Summer was facing Steve and they were sharing some pretty intense eye contact.

Steve's face was entirely red and Billy watched with his heart in his throat as Steve bit into his full bottom lip and nodded once.

Holy shit.

Steve was looking at him now. Waiting for him to do something. He was on the edge of the seat and so was Billy. They both leaned around Summer towards each other. And then Billy was actually kissing Steve and he thought Summer must be magic to make this happen.

For the first gut wrenching second, he was afraid Steve would change his mind and pull away. But he didn't. Billy almost couldn't believe it when the other boy eagerly kissed him back and everything was perfect. He could actually forget that they hadn't tried to basically murder each other a couple of months ago. Instead he could lose himself in the moment and the two beautiful people who deemed him worthy of joining for the most romantic holiday of the year.

Maybe, there was a chance he could have them both, he hoped gleefully.